



ELECTION INTEGRITY – TRUTH ABOUT IOWA

Article I, Section 4, Clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution empowers both Congress and state legislatures to regulate the “times, places and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives.”¹ Local and state election officials are responsible for administering elections for over half a million federal, state and local races, plus statewide and local ballot measures.² Because of this complexity, state legislatures should handle election laws so they can address the unique needs of the state while ensuring the security and integrity of the election process.

Due to COVID, many states adopted temporary changes to absentee and mail-in voting procedures.³ These emergency procedures, coupled with record turnout, exposed problems in state election processes that need to be addressed. On March 8, 2021 Governor Kim Reynolds (R-IA) signed Senate File (SF) 413, the first comprehensive election reform bill of 2021. SF 413 improves voter list maintenance, secures absentee ballots and standardizes election administration across the state.⁴ Highlights of the reform include:⁵

- **Improves the accuracy of voter registration rolls.**
 - The bill requires the state registrar to cross-reference voting lists in other states and use U.S. Postal Service change-of-address data.
 - The status of voters who do not vote in a general election is changed to “inactive”. They must miss two more general elections after being deemed “inactive” to have their registration canceled.
 - Iowa permits same-day voter registration. Eligible voters that have been removed from registration rolls due to a long period of inactivity can still reregister to vote on a future election day.
- **Increases the security of absentee ballots.**
 - Prohibits absentee ballot applications and ballots from being prefilled and automatically mailed to voters who have not requested them.
 - Changes the date absentee ballot requests can be processed from 120 to 70 days prior to the election.
 - Changes the date ballots can begin to be mailed out from 29 to 20 days before the election.
 - Requires legislative approval to automatically send out applications during a public health emergency.
 - Requires that mail-in ballots arrive by the time polls close to be counted.
 - Improves reporting on absentee ballot requests and completed ballot submissions.
- **Expands ways voters can return their ballots while preventing ballot harvesting.**
 - Legalizes ballot drop boxes by adding them to the law governing how absentee ballots can be returned.
 - Mandates that ballot drop boxes be located within a commission office or on adjacent property.
 - Requires video surveillance of drop boxes and additional security measures.
 - States that absentee ballots must be signed; if not, voters are given an opportunity to use a replacement ballot or vote in person no later than the time polls close on Election Day.
 - Mandates that only the voter, an individual living in the voter’s home, immediate family, or a caretaker may return a ballot.

- **Standardizes how elections are administered across the state while improving transparency and accountability.**
 - Requires that voters be directly notified when a change is made to their precinct polling place.
 - Gives the attorney general and county attorneys greater oversight to investigate election misconduct.
 - States that county election officials who violate election laws can be fined up to \$10,000.
 - Prohibits officials from interfering with election observers. Those who violate this will be guilty of election misconduct in the third degree.
 - Sets standardized procedures for establishing satellite voting stations by petition.
 - Limits in-person early voting to start 20 days, instead of 29 days, before the election.
 - Changes the poll closure time from 9:00 pm to 8:00 pm, which is the same or later than 48 other states.⁶
 - Requires private employers whose employees' schedules do not permit them to vote must provide two, rather than three hours, of paid time to participate in the election.

Impact on Voter Turnout

Following the signing of SF 413, Iowa's 2022 primary elections had the second highest turnout since 1994, nearly 123% increase compared to 2018.⁷ The general election also broke records and was the second-highest turnout, with less than 100,000 fewer voters than 2018.⁸

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¹ <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>

² <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2015/3/29/1372225/-Just-how-many-elected-officials-are-there-in-the-United-States-The-answer-is-mind-blowing>

³ [https://ballotpedia.org/Changes_to_absentee/mail-in_voting_procedures_in_response_to_the_coronavirus_\(COVID-19\)_pandemic,_2020](https://ballotpedia.org/Changes_to_absentee/mail-in_voting_procedures_in_response_to_the_coronavirus_(COVID-19)_pandemic,_2020)

⁴ State of Iowa, Office of the Governor, Kim Reynolds, Senate File 413 (March 8, 2021), available at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ba=SF413&ga=89>

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ [https://ballotpedia.org/State_Poll_Opening_and_Closing_Times_\(2021\)](https://ballotpedia.org/State_Poll_Opening_and_Closing_Times_(2021))

⁷ <https://www.weareiowa.com/amp/article/news/politics/elections/iowa-primary-election-2022-voter-turnout-secretary-of-state-polk-county-auditor/524-3deaab5c-de2d-4beb-9ab1-ef6ae4969074>

⁸ <https://www.kcci.com/amp/article/midterm-voter-turnout-strong-iowa/41921640>